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ABSTRACT

Evaluators who perform formative evaluations would be well served to apprise themselves of recent survey research in framing formative evaluations. Illustrative examples are used from research into such diverse areas of activity as: the development of identities attached to different forms of modern rock and roll; the rationales that juvenile probation officers use in assigning recommended sanctions to a hypothesized juvenile offender; factors associated with teacher burnout in a large metropolitan school district; and how standardized scores can affect minority applicants to a selective admissions community college allied health care program. Stakeholders and concerned audiences, as well as formative evaluators, can all benefit from a scrutiny of social survey research that was not done from an evaluation perspective. Such a search, whether the data are of either a qualitative or quantitative nature, can heuristically inform the particulars that surround specific evaluative populations. (Author)

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THE USE OF SOCIAL SURVEY DATA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORMATIVE EVALUATIONS

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A PAPER PRESENTED AT EVALUATION '87

AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

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SURVEY/EVALUATION

Social surveys, whether they be used for quantitative or qualitative purposes, are of vital importance to not only social scientists- but they are also instrumental to evaluators in doing formative evaluations. To properly frame the questions to be asked of participants and audience members during the planning stages of a formative evaluation is crucial to the development of the resultant evaluation. Data sets abound with much information that can be put to effective use by evaluators involved with formative evaluations. Questionnaires and interviews that touch upon topics that are of importance to the stakeholders in an evaluation often exist, collected and analyzed by practitioners of the education, business, and social science disciplines. It is the intent of this short paper to direct attention on how these sources of data can be utilized to inform decision making in light of the existent value structure that surrounds attitudes relevant to the formative evaluation.

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To apprehend reality through the lived in concerns of the target audience of an evaluation is not strictly the province of the naturalistic evaluator. More empirical evaluators also have to be aware of the attitudinal matrix of the decision makers, stakeholders, and audience members that comprise the milieu in which an evaluation

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ABSTRACT:Evaluators who perform formative evaluations would be well served to apprise themselves of recent survey research in framing formative evaluations. Illustrative examples are used from research into such diverse areas of activity as: the development of identities attached to different forms of modern rock and roll; the rationales that juvenile probation officers use in assigning recommended sanctions to a hypothesized juvenile offender; factors associated with teacher burnout in a large metropolitan school district; and how standardized scores can affect minority applicants to a selective admissions community college allied health care program.

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takes place. As the proper identification of the object that is to be implemented in a specific setting is of vital importance to the evaluator in a formative evaluation, there should exist a congruence between object identification and audience members concerns. This is where already extant social surveys can prove to be of value.

A case in point could be the recent concern over song lyrics in rock music. Much publicity has surrounded the supposed lewd and salacious nature of the verses of songs that youthful listeners are exposed to. A variety of special interest groups have put pressure upon national, state, and local governing bodies to enact legislation to protect youthful listeners. In lieu of legal redress, these same interest groups have called upon the recording industry to impose a voluntary program of placing rating labels upon their products. Before any of the concerned groups rush to implement legislation, and/or voluntary compliance programs they might be well served by evaluative recommendations based upon non-evaluative research into this area of concern.

Two researchers, Joseph A. Kotarba and Laura Wells, who explored this phenomena from the perspectives of sociology and anthropology, found that teens who attended an all age night club in a large, metropolitan area were largely unaware of the content of the song lyrics that they regularly listened to. Instead the two groups that raise the most concern amongst the aforementioned audiences, the Punkers and the Metal Heads, had developed other means of solidifying group solidarity, and enticing new members into their ranks.

Their research indicated that the subjects under scrutiny (i.e., the teenagers who attended the night club) were more interested in forming a social identity, rather than capitulating to actions derived out of song lyrics. As they noted...

> Although we were able to isolate four distinct styles of participation, we do not have any reason to believe that the club provides the genesis for individual identification with these styles. Put differently, the process of becoming a metal head or punk or whatever most likely begins at school or home or wherever peers interact on an everyday basis. Yet...the club creates the occasion for refining and testing out these identities (1987:413-14).

Stakeholders in program implementaion aimed at derailing the "harmful" effects of heavy metal and punk rock and roll lyrics might be better served to attend to other sources of deviant youthful activity than the implicit messages contained in song lyrics. Such research as cited above, could be useful in determining where program efforts could be best directed. This type of research evidence could be used by evaluators in regards to negotiating the proper allocation of time and resources to program implementation. Processually research results aiding formative evaluations could be viewed as Egon Guba notes that, "Naturalistic approaches can be used to help audiences realize-in the sense of make real-both the particulars of a case as well as the construction of those particulars entertained by each of the separate audiences." ((1987:28-29)

Naturalistic (i.e., qualitative) approaches to evalutive decision making are but only one means of using social survey data to inform stakeholders. The more traditional survey data derives from quantitative methods. These methods offer a statistical base by which the diverse audience members involved in evaluative decision making

can draw inferences as to the proper course of action. Dependent variables can be clearly identified and tested for causal links. Such linkages can be drawn upon when it comes time to design a program and implement a program theory. Theoretical linkages underlying program implememtation is important, for as Leonard Bickman has observed, "...by theoretically describing the effects and assumptions of the program, the evaluator can often provide corrective action for a program implementor." (1987:13)

This form of secondary analysis of quantitative data is ripe for productive use by program evaluators. Proper identification of stakeholders in regards to the diverse audience members that comprise evaluative concerns can be approximated through the use of survey data that was collected by other researchers for other reasons. Although research conducted by diverse practitioners for reasons other than evaluative decision making can be brought under methodological scrutiny, the focus of concern should not be methodological in its origin. Rather the concern should be in the area of program theory.

> ...since populations are in constant change, we have no way of knowing whether a survey accomplished some years ago for other purposes still applies meaningfully to the specific population. This problem of accuracy is not as important for generating theory about a type of social unit as it is for describing a particular social unit...What are relevant for theory are the general categories and properties and the general relations between them that emerge from the data. (Glaser and Strauss,1967:188-89)

Three other examples based on already existent research should be illustrative as to how social survey data can be of importance in formative evaluations. In a forthcoming article sociologists William A. Reese, Russell L. Curtis, Jr., and the executive director of a therapeutic juvenile facility-Albert Richard, Jr. used a scale in a social survey administered to juvenile probation officers. The scale posited a hypothetical case of a young female status offender. Respondents were asked to select out of a fixed choice matrix a series of sanctions that would be applied to the offender in descending order. Administrators of juvenile probation programs might be well advised to attend to the results of this study. This would be advantageous in terms of instituting programs to ensure equivalence of decision making in regards to sanctioning amongst juvenile probation officers. Keeping in mind that results from this study would not be directly transferable to specific programs, the conclusions of the researchers that,"In sum, the routinization of this department's goals are wittingly compromised by the inexperience of the novice JPO and the latitude afforded his seasoned counterpart, and the flexibility of the system is knowingly tempered by the experience of senior JPOs and the conformity of the junior JPOs" (1987:26) In any organization evaluators should apprise audience members of seemingly similar roles that differentially embedded realities attached to role performance can lead to divergent interpretations of task completion.

Another recent study could be given worthwhile credence by educationally oriented audiences and stakeholders. This would be Anthony Gary Dworkin's study of teacher burnout in the public schools. Much time, attention, and money has occupied teacher unions, educational administrators, school board members, parents, and taxpayers on the issue of teacher effectiveness, and teacher retention. Dworkin's study produced some conclusions that would prove of interest to the above audiences and stakeholders, but the

conclusions would also prove of interest to cost effectiveness oriented evaluators. Chief among his findings in regards to his sample was that low salaries were not a cause of teacher quitting behavior. Greater causes of stress were associated with teaching students off grade level, decreasing school resources, and interacting with administrators. This last factor produced a result that showed...

> that the principal's role as faculty evaluator is significantly associated with teacher alienation and quitting behavior...a difference score between principal's administrative style and that preferred by the teacher affected burnout, plans to quit, and actual quitting behavior. That principals are charged with evaluating teacher performance and that some principals use every interaction as a data point for evaluation may be a stressor for the teachers in the present sample. (1987:77)

Formative evaluations of teacher burnout could benefit from this study in regards to the allocation of program time and program money. If the results of this study have cross-setting validity, then teacher retention programs should also focus ameliorative efforts on their principals. A final example of social survey research will suffice to conclude this paper.

Selective admissions to two year colleges allied health care programs are not unusual. Even in open admission institutions some programs are scrutinized. This is particularly the case where graduates are subjected to state mandated exit testing. In these instances administrators have prior knowledge of the efficacy of their progams being judged on an institutional basis, determined by the

percentage of their graduates who pass the state mandated examinations. Program administrators may find themselves under internal and external pressures to exclude applicants to such programs who may appear to be poor risks. These exclusions may stem from administrative philosophies regarding the human capital of the applicants, or they may stem from organizational pressures that view administrative decision making in a poor light if the passing rate of program graduates falls below a certain percentage. Evaluators who might try to direct program administrators into more equitable decision making policies, in regards to admission criteria in allied health programs, would be well served by a perusal of a study by Mark A. Ginsburg and Joanne R. Giles. Ginsburg a sociologist, and Giles an allied health practitioner, found that while interviewing program directors of such previously mentioned allied health programs, that often unexamined factors played a crucial role in admission decisions. From an evaluative perspective they uncovered how program ideologies could be connected to the realities of the political concerns of program stakeholders. Most tellingly they found that admission policies, despite an official stance of open admissions acted against minority applicants.

> Not only is the structure operating against minorities-they are being cooled-out-, while whites are being warmed-up-but majority and minority students (and others) may be learning to accept the structure unproblematically...These gatekeepers and perhaps their colleagues and program applicants may be coming to share views that occupational-related selection in this program (and by inference most educational settings) is fair and just. (1984:296)

In conclusion, formative evaluations can certainly benefit from evaluators making stakeholders and concerned audiences aware of social survey data. This can prevent evaluators, stakeholders, and the target audiences from asking plaintive inquiries regarding program

implementation during a summative evaluation. Or if they are given to identity impression management maintenance, it can obviate them as to being put in the position,"...of the horseman who, on being thrown from his steed, declared that he was 'simply dismounting'" (Merton,1976:148).

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